

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 180906Z JUN 78
FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6320
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USLO RIYADH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DHAHRAN 0778/1

EXDIS

E.O. 11652:GDS
TAGS: SHUM, ELAB, SA

SUBJECT: NEW SAUDI DECREE AGAINST WOMEN WORKING

REF: (A) RIYADH 0397, (B) RIYADH 0398

1. CONGEN HAS CALLED ON SEVERAL LARGE LOCAL FIRMS IN AN EFFORT TO DETERMINE WHAT MEASURES ARE CURRENTLY BEING TAKEN IN EASTERN PROVINCE TO ENFORCE NEW MININT DECREE ON WOMEN WORKING. THE TWO FIRMS WHICH APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN MOST AFFECTED ARE NORTHROP AND BRITISH AIRCRAFT CORP. BOTH COMPANIES HAVE RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS FROM LOCAL MININT OFFICIALS TO ADVISE ALL WOMEN MARRIED TO THEIR REGULAR EMPLOYEES TO TERMINATE ANY POSITIONS THEY MAY HOLD WITH OTHER FIRMS. BAC COMPLIED WITH THIS ORDER ON 10 JUNE BY ADVISING ALL FEMALE DEPENDENTS TO TERMINATE ANY POSITIONS THEY HOLD AT PRESENT. NORTHROP HAS REFERRED THIS ORDER TO THE ROYAL SAUDI AIR FORCE, THEIR SPONSOR, FOR A DECISION ON IMPLEMENTATION. POST HAS ALSO LEARNED THAT THE UNIVERSITY OF PETROLEUM AND MINERALS, PRESUMABLY UNDER INSTRUCTIONS RELAYED THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER
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EDUCATION, TERMINATED ALL FEMALE EMPLOYEES 10 DAYS AGO, INCLUDING SOME WOMEN NOT PREVIOUSLY AFFECTED BY SUCH RECURRENT TERMINATION ORDERS.

2. BECTEL CORP. INFORMS US THAT THEY HAVE TERMINATED ALL FEMALE EMPLOYEES WHOSE HUSBANDS ARE EMPLOYED BY NORTHROP OR BAC. BECAUSE OF STRONG RUMORS OF AN IMMINENT RAID BY

LABOR AND/OR PASSPORT OFFICIALS TO DETERMINE THE NUMBER AND CONDITION OR WORKING WOMEN AT BECHTEL, THE COMPANY CONTACTED THE SAG LABOR MINISTRY IN DAMMAM WITHIN THE LAST FEW DAYS. COMPANY OFFICIALS WERE INFORMED THAT SUCH A RAID WOULD NOT TAKE PLACE BEFORE JULY. BECHTEL PERSONNEL INTERPRETED THIS REMARK AS A CLEAR WARNING TO PUT THEIR HOUSE IN ORDER AS FAR AS WORKING WOMEN ARE CONCERNED. BECHTEL HAS ALSO BEEN INSTRUCTED BY THE ROYAL COMMISSION FOR JUBAIL AND YANBU, WITH WHOM THEY HOLD THEIR PRIMARY MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR CONTRACTS, TO REPLACE ALL WOMEN CURRENTLY EMPLOYED WITH MEN. THE COMMISSIONS SPOKESMAN STRONGLY IMPLIED THAT THE COMMISSION COULD NO LONGER AFFORD TO OVERLOOK THE ILLEGAL EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN BECAUSE OF PRESSURES FROM ELSEWHERE IN SAG, AS MUCH AS THEY WOULD PREFER TO. BECHTEL IS CURRENTLY MAKING PLANS TO REPLACE PERMANENTLY ALL WOMEN EMPLOYEES OVER THE NEXT SIX TO EIGHT MONTHS. THE COMPANY HAS ALREADY BEGUN THE PROCESS OF RECRUITING MALE FILIPINO CLERKS AND IS APPLYING FOR A BLOCK VISA FOR THEIR FUTURE ENTRY.

3. POST HAS RECEIVED AS YET UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT TWO WOMEN EMPLOYED BY A SMALL SAUDI FIRM AND THEIR HUSBANDS HAVE BEEN DEPORTED WITHIN THE LAST WEEK FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE SAUDI LABOR LAW. WE WILL ATTEMPT TO CONFIRM THIS
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REPORT AT FIRST POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY. REPORTEDLY THESE WOMEN WERE APPREHENDED WHILE ON THE JOB AND THEIR HUSBANDS WERE CALLED IN IMMEDIATELY. ALL WERE INFORMED THAT THEIR EXIT VISAS AND DEPORTATION WOULD BE ARRANGED WITHIN 24 HOURS.

4. DURING COURTESY CALL JUNE 14 ON EMIR ABDUL MOHSUN BIN JILUWI, CONSUL GENERAL RAISED QUESTION OF NEW DECREE BY MINISTRY OF INTERIOR REGARDING EXPATRIATE WOMEN WORKING. EMIR SAID THAT HE HAD HEARD OF SOME NEW REGULATIONS BUT THAT HE HAD NOT YET SEEN THEM. CONSUL GENERAL POINTED OUT UNFORTUNATE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS FOR SAUDI

ARABIA
THAT COULD OCCUR IF NEWS STORIES ABOUT FORCED TERMINATION OF WORKING WOMEN HERE BEGAN APPEARING IN WESTERN PRESS. EMIR SEEMED RECEPTIVE TO THIS ARGUMENT AND STATED THAT AS LONG AS MEN AND WOMEN WERE COMPLETELY SEPARATED AT THE PLACE OF WORK, HE DID NOT FORESEE ANY SPECIAL DIFFICULTY FOR LOCAL FIRMS WITH CURRENT SAG POLICY. HOWEVER, WHEN CONSUL GENERAL BROUGHT UP THE ADDITIONAL COST FACTOR OF FIRMS HAVING TO REPLACE RESIDENT WOMEN WORKERS WITH NEW EXPATRIATE MALE

SECRETARIES, EMIR DISMISSED THE ARGUMENT WITH RHETORICAL QUESTION: "YOU WOULD NOT EXPECT US TO FORSAKE OUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS FOR SOME COST REASONS?" (THUS, IT APPEARS THAT ADDED COST ARGUMENT WILL NOT BE OF MUCH USE IN CONVINCING SUCH SAUDI CONSERVATIVES AS EMIR).

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DHAHRAN 0778
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5. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH IT APPEARS THAT ONLY ISOLATED ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO ENFORCE THE NEW MINPET DECREE, THERE IS QUITE EVIDENTLY STRONG NEW PRESSURE TO BRING SOME COMPANIES INTO LINE WITH THIS REAFFIRMED POLICY. CONGEN WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR POSITIVE STEPS TAKEN TO TERMINATE EXPATRIATE FEMALE EMPLOYEES BY LOCAL SAG OFFICIALS AND TO CONFIRM THE REPORTS THAT AT LEAST FOUR PERSONS HAVE BEEN DEPORTED AS A RESULT OF THIS NEW ENFORCEMENT CAMPAIGN IN THE E.P. ALMOST ALL OF THE COMPANIES CONTACTED BY THIS POST WERE AWARE OF HARD DAYS TO COME FOR WOMEN EMPLOYEES. BECAUSE OF THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF LONG STANDING LAWS AGAINST THE HIRING OF WOMEN, MOST COMPANIES APPEAR TO BELIEVE THAT THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN WILL EVENTUALLY BLOW OVER AS HAVE ALL PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO ENFORCE SUCH RULINGS. IN THE MEANTIME MANY COMPANIES ARE ADVISING THEIR WOMEN EMPLOYEES TO GO HOME AND SIT OUT THIS NEWEST INITIATIVE WITH THE FULL EXPECTATION THAT THEY WILL BE BACK ON THE JOB BY RAMADAN.

6. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH THE EMIR ENJOYS NOMINAL CONTROL OF ALL SAG OPERATION IN THE EASTERN PROVINCE AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO FAVOR EXTREME ACTION AGAINST WORKING WOMEN, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT LOCAL LABOR OR PASSPORT OFFICIALS COULD ACT DIRECTLY ON ORDERS FROM CENTRAL

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MINISTRIES WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE EMIR'S OFFICE. HOWEVER,
EMIR PROMISED TO MAKE INQUIRIES REGARDING STATUS OF
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR DECREE AND TO CONTINUE DIALOGUE WITH
CONGEN ON PROBLEMS THAT MIGHT ARISE.
MEYERS

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